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**TESTIMONY RE: R.B 1121 AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH
PARITY AND THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE CHARTER OAK HEALTH
PLAN**

Public Health Committee
March 16, 2009

TO: Senator Harris, Representative Ritter and members of the Public Health Committee

FROM: Mary Jane Williams, RN, PhD, chairperson, Government Relations Committee, Connecticut Nurses' Association

Thank-you for the opportunity to provide testimony on behalf of the Connecticut Nurses' Association (CNA), the professional organization for registered nurses in Connecticut, for Raised Bill 1121, An Act Concerning Mental Health Parity and the Administration of the Charter Oak Health Plan. I am Mary Jane Williams, current chairperson of its Government Relations Committee and professor and chair of nursing at the University of Hartford. I have practiced nursing for over 40 years and have been educating nurses in Connecticut in both the public and private sector for over 35 years.

Our Association supports this bill which will ensure that the Charter Oak Health Plan offers mental health coverage that is consistent with the state's mental health parity law, includes the Charter Oak Health Plan as a component of the Behavioral Health Partnership and ends discrimination of Connecticut's citizens with mental health conditions that have not been covered under the Charter Oak Health Plan.

Mental health conditions:

- can affect anyone. "Each year, upwards of one in four people in the US will have a diagnosable disorder." (Mental Health Association of CT - www.mhact.org).

- can be a co-morbidity with physical illness which compounds the disease and makes mental health treatment an important and integral part of an effective plan of care.
- can create tremendous suffering and unhealthy social and emotional environments for children to grow in.
- can cause loss of jobs leading to potential poverty
- can be treated and recovery is possible.

CNA supports measures related to health care reform and delivery of and access to care that includes physical, mental and dental services for all. The individuals who have Charter Oak Health Plan Coverage need nothing less than that.

Thank you and we urge the members of the committee to vote favorably for this bill.